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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of a collaboration between the St. Louis (Missouri) Public Schools and Maryville University (Missouri) to develop an early childhood magnet center and professional development school (PDS), the Wilkinson Early Childhood Magnet School. This school serves a diverse population of children from age 3 through second grade. The purpose of the magnet school/PDS is to provide an exemplary education for students and their families; to function as a center for inservice and preservice teacher development; and to inquire into curriculum and practice appropriate for children in the school's age range. Strategies to develop exemplary practice have focused on developing and implementing a constructivist curriculum. Successes that have been achieved can be attributed largely to the sense of shared ownership among school and university staff. Obstacles to implementation have come from a variety of sources, including resistance to the constructivist approach from teachers and conflict between the constructivist curriculum and assessment framework and the requirements and policies of the school district. Shared decision making has produced both ownership, and thus support, of the program, as well as strains on personal relationships and staff schedules. Communication has been the greatest challenge to the collaboration. Although efforts are being made to advance institutionalization of the PDS concept, obstacles from the state, district, university, and school must be overcome. (IAH)

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An Early Childhood Professional Development School: Triumphs and Troubles

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AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL: TRIUMPHS AND TROUBLES

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present a case study of the efforts of the St. Louis Public Schools and Maryville University - St. Louis to collaboratively develop an early childhood magnet center and professional development school whose purpose is to provide exemplary education for the young child and his or her family, to serve as a center for inservice and preservice teacher development , and to inquire into curriculum and practice appropriate for children from the age of three through second grade. During its four years of existence, Wilkinson Early Childhood Magnet School has been recognized by Redbook Magazine as the 1993 State of Missouri's Outstanding Elementary School, a 1994 State of Missouri Gold Star School, and a 1994 Presidential Blue Ribbon School. The program in place at the school embodies the most current research in the field of early childhood education, school improvement , and teacher education.

In 1989, faculty from Maryville University - St. Louis, became involved in a court mandated curriculum project whose purpose was the planning of three early childhood magnet schools in the City of St. Louis. The schools were intended to serve children from the age of three through grade two at which point the children would pass on to other magnet schools in the St. Louis district. As part of a voluntary interdistrict desegregation order and based on the recommendations of an external magnet review committee, these schools were to utilize a constructivist curriculum with a strong parent involvement component as well as the establishment of a long-term relationship with a community institution. The resulting curriculum was collaboratively developed by teachers, administrators and parents from the St. Louis City and St. Louis County Public Schools and Maryville University and was based on the State of Missouri's Project Construct Early Childhood Curriculum and Assessment Framework and the goals and objectives of the St. Louis Schools. A network of collaborative committees planned and prepared the curriculum and assessment framework, a parent involvement component, an evaluation design and a description for the establishment of Wilkinson Early Childhood Magnet Center as a professional development school. Because of the diversity of the student population and a racially balanced teaching staff, the site provides an excellent multicultural setting for a professional development school.

The collaboration is unique in that the faculties of both the school and the school of education of the university embrace a shared philosophy and curriculum perspective thus providing an unusually rich environment for the development of young children and teacher education students, and the professional growth of both university and school staff. The planning for the school and its continuing nurturing is

an ongoing collaborative endeavor joining the district, the school, and the university in a joint venture into school renewal. Has the partnership experienced successes? Absolutely! Have there been tensions? Most certainly!

The first task undertaken in establishing the school was the hiring of a staff open to the possibilities of a developmentally appropriate constructivist curriculum and the concept of a professional development school. In order to maximize the possibility for successful implementation, interviewees were advised of the curriculum perspective and their participation in a professional development school and were encouraged to reflect upon their willingness to embrace these ideas prior to acceptance of a position. Joint teams composed of district and university representatives made the final selections. Staff and administrators from the school as well as university faculty involved in the project then participated as a unit in orientation in the curriculum prior to the opening of the site adding a second layer of shared ownership. This was enhanced by an additional week of team building during which the combined group wrote school wide goals for children, parents, and teachers and organized themselves into a working whole.

Exemplary Practice

The success of implementation of the curriculum to date is evidenced in the awards received by the school. From the perspective of the various players from the school and the university it is due, in great part, to a sense of shared ownership. Curriculum decisions are made easier by a common framework shared by teachers, administrators, university faculty and teacher education students participating at the school. Teachers feel a sense of ownership for their instructional decisions and for the environment of their classroom while being guided by the broader curriculum framework. Administrators, because they embrace the same perspective, support the efforts of the staff in attaining the common goal. A consistent group of university faculty are weekly participants in the education process working with children, teachers, administrators, parents, and the teacher education students.

The path to exemplary practice most certainly is not a smooth one. While some teachers initially professed a desire to implement a constructivist approach, movement has been slow in some cases and all but nonexistent in a very few instances. The curriculum requires that the teacher internalize a set of theoretical underpinnings which guide instructional decision making and for some this is both unknown and uncomfortable territory. It is easy to fall back on familiar ways while attempting a metamorphosis from behaviorism to constructivism. The fact that the curriculum is a framework and not a set of clearly defined lessons with accompanying consumable worksheets causes consternation and concern in such individuals.

A variety of strategies have been attempted to support these persons. Regularly occurring inservice presentations are planned and presented which are based on the needs identified by the staff. At the end of each year, the total staff and involved faculty assess progress for the year and set goals for the following year. University consultants assist staff in the development of classroom plans and resources, observe implementation growth and provide feedback to individual teachers. Most recently, all staff were asked to identify ways in which they would pursue curriculum growth which ranged from continued consultant support, visitations to other classrooms, to establishing a mentoring relationship with another member of the staff. The principal has consistently supported individual growth in implementation and has, in several instances, counseled individuals to examine whether remaining at the school is a good match with their personal teaching philosophy.

A second impediment to implementation is conflict between the requirements of a constructivist curriculum and assessment framework and the curriculum requirements and policies of the district. Both the administrators and the teachers are under constant pressure to fulfill district requirements that are inconsistent with what is deemed appropriate for young children. Within the early childhood research community testing of young children below the age of eight is considered inappropriate and yet both the state and the district place heavy emphasis on standardized test scores. As is often the case, the goals and objectives of the district are then aligned with the test. In such a situation teachers are expected to serve two masters and the school administration is evaluated by how well the benchmarks are met. For the majority of the staff who have internalized the constructivist framework and who are knowledgeable about what skills are appropriate for the children they serve this has not been a problem. Indeed, the school was one of only three in the district who had all grade levels at or above the national norm on the Stanford Achievement Test.

But, one of the aims of a professional development school is to bring about change based on current knowledge of best practice. Toward this effort the school and the university consultants have worked with the evaluation division of the district to explore new forms of assessment and have piloted alternatives. The school staff, administrators and university consultants have met together to explore the relationship between the district objectives and the goals of the constructivist curriculum framework. Inservice presentations have been given on portfolio assessment and a variety of ways to assess child growth have been explored.

From the university perspective, conflict is sometimes seen between the expectations of education students as they participate at the school in practicums and student teaching and the emerging curriculum knowledge and implementation levels of the school staff. Some education students in their naivete expect the ideal and often express concern, and at times righteous indignation, at what they believe are practices

inconsistent with constructivism. Efforts have been made to help students become aware that the curriculum is evolving as school staff construct their own knowledge. School staff on the other hand meet with both university faculty and education students to discuss alternative teaching strategies and the rationale for selection of such strategies. It is viewed as a growth process for all concerned.

Shared Decision Making

As the school and its staff have matured, a change has occurred in their taking ownership for decision making and for explorations into their own practices. During the first two years of the school, many of the teachers grappled with the implementation of a new and unfamiliar curriculum approach requiring support from university consultants in providing inservice workshops and feedback on the degree of implementation. By year three, a considerable number of the teachers had internalized the constructivist curriculum and began the process of assuming responsibility for the planning and implementation of new instructional materials and experiences based on the needs and interests of the children. As these teachers have become more involved in this process, they have begun to make inquiries into their own practices. Now, the university faculty serve as resources for and collaborators with the staff. All of the partners have come to know that collaboration requires enormous amounts of time and commitment, that change is a constructivist process, and that that process cannot be hurried.

Because of the support of two exceptional administrators, the staff have also become decision makers in the functioning of the school. Numerous committees have been developed which serve to oversee both the immediate needs of the learning community and to plan and execute the long range plan of the school. Just as teachers encourage children to become increasingly self-directed, they have come to know that they must also behave in an autonomous manner.

This is a new role for many of the school staff and varying levels of interest in and commitment to decision making are observable. For some staff, personal decisions do not always match those of others participating in the decision making process resulting in bitterness or withdrawal from the process. For others, once they find that they truly have decision making power they mistakenly believe that that power is limitless which belies the realities of a large urban district and the collaborative process. There is no doubt that group decision making is time consuming and that there is little or no remuneration for the efforts of the participants. Therefore, from an administrative view, it is certainly more expedient to mandate decisions than to go through the process of joint decision making. There are occasional times, too, when decisions are in conflict with what university consultants believe to be represented in the research on best practice.

To encourage participation in the decision making process, various enticements have been enacted. The university has arranged for free graduate credits, or in the case of teaching assistants undergraduate credit, for joint planning projects such as cooperating teacher workshops and development of the concept of the professional development school. A limiting factor in such an arrangement is that the university faculty member involved serves without pay and then uses the experience as part of his or her service commitment for promotion and tenure. In addition, university adjunct status with library use and access to university facilities is granted to staff involved with the development of teacher education students.

In addressing the problem of time for the decision making process, opportunity has been afforded to staff to meet during the school day. Extra service monies have been made available for extended school wide planning and decision making prior to the start of the normal school year and after the close of school at the end of the year. Funds for such activities have been sought from outside sources and are included as a part of the annual budget of the school.

Interface With Teacher Education Students

Education students find the school an excellent environment in which to grow and mature. Students working at the school participate as members of a professional community. They find it rewarding to be able to practice what is studied in their university classes. They also find the staff willing to share in collaborative inquiries into practice. As a result of the success of the school in working with university students, school staff and university faculty are in the process of collaboratively planning a site-based early childhood certification program.

All of the participants believe that having teacher education students in the classrooms helps the school staff to more clearly reflect upon their own practices and to articulate a rationale for their curricular and instructional decisions. Interfacing with university students and faculty keeps the teachers aware of what is current in the field of early childhood education. Because of the ongoing interaction and collaboration between the university faculty and the school staff, there is a high level of shared knowledge, openness to risk taking, and awareness on the part of the university faculty members of the sequence of learning experiences being provided for children in a given classroom and how those children are developing.

As with other functions of the professional development school, interfacing with teacher education students brings its own set of concerns. Time is an issue for all involved. It is difficult within the school day to meet with students for planning, discussion of school related issues and reflecting on lessons taught or observed. University faculty have difficulty scheduling observations of multiple education students within the school and still balancing their own teaching load and university related activities.

The school is highly sought after as a student teaching site for other teacher preparation institutions in the state. Since the district views the school as an exemplary setting an attempt is made to accommodate students from these colleges and universities and it becomes difficult to find sufficient placements within the school. Some institutions send students who lack knowledge of constructivist theory and practice which adds to the time needed to work with that student. Additionally, not all of the teachers of the school are at a level of implementation where it is felt that they are ready to serve as exemplary models. A related observation has been that several of the most exemplary teachers in the school do not work as well in the area of the development of the novice teacher or lack the interpersonal skills necessary to support a student's growth. The question can also be asked, at what point are there too many teacher education students in a building and are the children of the school suffering as a result of this?

As noted above, an effort has been made to support school staff in enhancing their knowledge and skills in the curriculum in order that the number of exemplary models may be expanded. The workshop for cooperating teachers provides a forum for discussing ways in which school staff and university faculty share in the process of the development of a future teacher. Ongoing discussion occurs in this area.

Headway has been made with the district in giving priority to the placement of Maryville students in the school and, now, allows the school to negotiate such placements without going through the central office. The agreement evolved over time and through numerous discussions with district administration. This has been a difficult concession since the district has strong historic ties to one of the local teacher preparation institutions. Constant changes in central office administration has meant that such agreements are regularly renegotiated as each new individual assumes responsibility. Yearly reports documenting the course of events at the school and an evaluation of the progress of the children and implementation activities are developed by the university consultants and presented to the district as a way of keeping central office administration apprised of current practices and procedures.

Communication

Without a doubt the area of greatest challenge has been in the area of communication. Genuine effort has been made to keep all of the participants informed of what goes on in the collaborative relationship. School staff receive regular reports on the progress of the PDS, proposed activities, opportunities for growth or involvement with students from the university. New ideas or concepts are presented for consensus, approval and again for updating to the total faculty at faculty meetings. There is a weekly schedule of events developed and distributed by the school instructional coordinator to which the university has input. Meetings are announced and university involvement for the week clarified. Involved university faculty meet

weekly to exchange points of view and assess progress. Everyone has a voice in the communication process and most school related problems which arise are quickly solved.

More problematic is interpersonal communication. Conflicts between staff members occur because of perceived differences in levels of knowledge of the curriculum, ownership of ideas, and an inability of some staff to tolerate the points of view of others. Such behaviors result in a superficial level of communication when attempting to solve conflicts between staff members. Other persons tend to back down rather than confront a conflict with another individual. Still others imply agreement with a group decision and then go their own way.

Conflicts arise over points of theory and practice as university students and faculty interact with the school staff. Also, the interface with a continually changing central office administration and the university is at times frustrating. Both institutions truly believe they know and understand the various agreements collaboratively reached but, too often, the perceptions are quite different. Because the school is a magnet school with the district and the State sharing the cost of the desegregation, on a yearly basis the State takes exception to the funding of the professional school concept and the involvement of the university. In spite of the best of intentions, communication of the work being done at the school is limited. Enormous amounts of time and energy are spent addressing such problems at both the school and university level.

From the very start of the relationship, avenues were explored to build a sense of community. The first year of the school a forum was initiated by the teaching staff to address problems and concerns and to brainstorm ways to improve problematic situations. Now, with the school in its fifth year, the forum is all but defunct. Whether this is because of a lack of interest and commitment or the greater use of a committee structure is uncertain. Outside consultants have been brought in to present conflict resolution strategies and adult communication models. At the close of the school year each June, a one to two day meeting is held at which the health of the school and the university partnership is discussed. Committees are developed to address issues, seek solutions and present findings to the group.

Communication between the various players is an ongoing problem. Because the partnership involves the State, the district, the school, the school of education and the university as a whole, vigilance must be maintained to see that lines of communication are open and honest. It is all too easy to for any or all of the partners to make demands of one another rather than seeking unified agreement. Such honesty requires the building of trust and that can only occur over time. But, trust is a fragile thing and ways need to be explored of rethinking the manner in which we have traditionally communicated with one another.

The Institutionalization of the Professional Development School Concept

On the surface, the various partners have "bought into" the concept of a professional development school. Teachers feel a sense of personal and professional development and a sense of contributing to the profession. They see themselves as change agents as they work with university faculty and teacher education students. The district actively seeks collaboration for school improvement and is beginning to explore ways in which the curriculum innovations being tried at the school can be utilized elsewhere in the district. The university faculty participate at the school as consultants, workshop presenters, classroom instructors, curriculum resources, and as research collaborators with the school staff. The involvement with the school is enhancing the teaching strategies of involved faculty and provides renewed interest in various research areas. The State, the district and the university point with pride to the accomplishments of the school and its national recognition as a Presidential Blue Ribbon School.

As with all professional development schools, time, money and willingness to participate are ongoing tensions. School staff maintain a fine balance between serving children and the duties of membership in a professional development school. Outside obligations such as continued schooling, family concerns, and the need to work multiple jobs takes its toll on PDS involvement by the teaching staff. At times, too, resentment occurs among some staff members when persons deeply involved in the PDS decision making process are viewed as dominating the agenda.

An additional concern involves the movement of school staff from viewing themselves as "cooperating teachers" to developers of future teachers. In part this appears to be a time problem wherein teachers struggle for sufficient time to meet with education students and still meet their other school obligations. But, it is also a matter of redefining one's role in the process. It will be interesting to see if a collaboratively planned site-based program will provide teachers with a greater sense of ownership in the development process.

The district, while enjoying the prestige of the school, still elects to impose upon the school many district-wide policies and procedures which are in conflict with developmentally appropriate practices. Because the school is in a large urban district with limited funds, resources to support professional development school activities are limited.

The university, too, points with pride to the work of the collaboration yet has not totally institutionalized the relationship. Contracts which run beyond the traditional academic year pose problems when compared to other faculty on campus. Funding of positional development school positions must be justified with credit hours generated.

At the School of Education level similar tensions exist. Faculty have, to date, continued to retain ownership for course content for education students involved at the school rather than jointly collaborating with the school in the planning of the courses. Hopefully this will change as a site-based program is collaboratively planned and implemented by partners from the school and the university. While supportive of the professional development school concept, not all faculty have elected to avail themselves of access to the school. Greater effort also needs to be made to involve liberal arts faculty with the school, its teachers and children.

For university faculty working at the school, the tension is between working with education students, providing services to the professional development school and teaching courses. There simply are not enough day time hours to give adequate attention to these conflicting draws on the time of the individual.

Beginning efforts have been made to rectify these concerns. It is assumed that all of the individuals who are a part of the teaching staff are members of the PDS. Toward this effort, staff are compiling the ways in which they contribute to the PDS through the use of a professional development portfolio. Goals are also set to expand their involvement in the PDS and to improve their practice. Outside funding from the Monsanto Fund and other sources are helping to support the efforts of the PDS. Time is provided during the school day for teachers to meet together and with teacher education students.

The district and the university collaboratively developed a set of policies to guide the involvement of the two institutions as the PDS emerges. The district has worked in concert with the university and the Monsanto Fund in seeking funding for professional development activities, curriculum enhancements, and research.

The university actively encourages the participation of faculty in the professional development school. Involved faculty are given credit for participation for purposes of promotion and tenure under scholarship and community service. The university supports the pursuit of funding for the ongoing work of the PDS.

Summary

As the partnership looks back over the past four years, it is believed that great strides have been made in forging a true collaboration. The school is well on its way to becoming a site of exemplary practice at the early childhood level. All of the partners recognize the positive effects the work of the PDS at Wilkinson is having on practice at the school. Inservice teachers of the school are autonomously pursuing improvements in their own teaching and in how they work with developing teacher education students. The teacher education students are being immersed in a professional atmosphere where they and their faculty instructors are free to engage in

curriculum explorations. The faculty instructors are engaging in testing the relationship between theory and practice.

Is the task done? This collaborative can't help but wonder if the task ever will or should ever be thought of as completed. Is not the purpose of a PDS the ongoing renewal of the schools? To those of us involved in this endeavor is it the end point , or the journey, that is of the greatest value? While the path is not always smooth, all of the partners would agree that it is the journey.

ST. LOUIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS' WILKINSON EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER – MARYVILLE UNIVERSITY PDS COLLABORATION

	1987 -1988	1988 - 1989	1989 - 1990	1990 - 1991	1991 - 1992	1992 - 1993	1993 - 1994
COURT	- Magnet Review Committee recommends institutional collaboration, lab school concept and constructivist curriculum	- Collaborative plan received by the Court	- Court approves plan for the early childhood schools				- Court considering ongoing inservice fund for PDS work
DISTRICT	- RFP sent to institutions interested in program planning for new magnet schools	- District, county, Maryville collaborative committees plan curriculum, evaluation, PDS concept, parent involvement	- Fire prohibits opening of Wilkinson school for one year - Pilot program in 4 classrooms given permission - Grant provides for parent involvement coordinator - Teachers and aides receive one week of curriculum training	- Teachers/aides hired jointly by district, principal and Maryville for Wilkinson - Exception taken by the state in funding library and computer lab for Wilkinson	- Remaining staff hired - Exception taken by the State to fund inservice for staff	- District questions PDS concept - Collaborative committee develops PDS document - District refuses to fund PDS coordinator	- State takes exception to funding inservice and Maryville's involvement at the school - Maryville involvement approved by the State - Ruling on inservice funds sent to court for approval
MARYVILLE UNIVERSITY	- Preparation of RFP - Grant given to plan 3 early childhood magnet schools	- University faculty participate in collaborative planning committees	- Four year grant received from the Monsanto Co. to conduct pilot, fund science/math lab at university and provide weekly consulting to the pilot school, purchase materials and fund aides for the pilot - One year grant received from the Danforth Foundation to fund parent coordinator at pilot - Weekly consulting, monthly inservice provided to pilot staff - University teaching lab opens	- Provision of 1 week of inservice to school staff in the areas of curriculum, and team building - Provision for 2 consultants to conduct weekly visitations and monthly inservice - Small number of university practicum students and student teachers placed at the school - Wilkinson principal serves on Teacher Education Committee - Reading Methods students conduct literacy task at the school - Teachers select materials for the classrooms	- Privision for 2 consultants to conduct weekly visitations to the school and monthly inservice in the area of science - Placement of practicum and student teachers at the school - Interested staff at the school given university adjunct status - Membership in PDS collaborative with other local universities begun	- Provision for 3 consultants including PDS coordinator for weekly visitations and monthly voluntary inservices - Free course given to school staff interested in defining and planning PDS concept - Support given in responding to State budget exceptions and writing application for - Redbook outstanding school award - PDS document approved by university Board of Trustees	- Provision of 3 consultants for weekly visitation and inservice - Science inservice in area of physical science given monthly - Faculty member spends sabbatical team teaching in first grade - Staff member from Wilkinson teaches reading methods course for faculty member on sabbatical - Monsanto grant renewed for 2 additional years - Support given in responding to State budget questions and writing - Presidential Blue Ribbon application
WILKINSON SCHOOL			- Principal and instructional coordinator hired for Wilkinson	- All receive one week of curriculum training and 1 week of team building - School opens with 2 preschools, 3 Kdg., 3 first grades and 1 special education room - Renovation of the school continues - Staff develops Forum to respond to staff concerns - Parent School Based Management group, PTO, volunteerism and parent workshops begun	- New staff receive one week of curriculum training - All staff retreat and inservice provided - Renovation completed - One preschool, 2 second grades and 2 special education classes added - Library at full use - High school volunteers begin work at the school - Staff serve as state curriculum trainers	- Staff Forum no longer functions - Staff present at state and local conferences - First group of second graders goes on to other magnet schools - Follow up of second grade students begun - Research on cross-age grouping explored by preschool teachers and university faculty member - Pilot of inclusion model begun by Kdg. teachers - Teacher initiated curriculum research begun by teachers - Redbook outstanding school award received	- TEAC committee begun to address staff concerns - Staff present at state and national conferences and provide inservice for district preschool teachers - Teacher initiated parent involvement grand funded - Inclusion model implemented at the Kdg level - Biomes project funded & implemented - Blue Ribbon document submitted - Gold Star award made by the State to the school

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